

February 19, 2015

To the Connecticut Public Health Committee:

As a genetic counselor and leader in genetic counseling for Hartford HealthCare, I support SB No. 857, and proposed amendments: An act concerning licensure for genetic counselors. I commend those whose efforts went into raising licensure for genetic counselors into a bill.

My experience as a genetic counselor in Connecticut has allowed me the opportunity to touch the lives of hundreds of patients and their families. Genetic counseling and testing can make a profound impact. Genetic counseling is not about ordering "a simple test," as a genetic counselor, I help patients to make informed medical decisions, and help them to deal with difficult situations. The decision of whether or not to have testing can be a challenging one for patients to make and I am there for them to help them to make the best decision for their unique situation.

With the recent advancements in the technology, availability, and insurance coverage, genetic testing is becoming more accessible yet complicated than ever. Genetic counselors are specialty trained to handle these challenges, and to stay current with the rapidly-evolving changes in our field. In my personal experience as a genetic counselor in Connecticut, I could provide a number of adverse events that occurred which could have been prevented had the patients been seen by an appropriately trained genetic counselor. These cases include genetic test results being misinterpreted by a non-genetics provider, inadequate information provided to a patient of how test results impact family members, incorrect or inadequate genetic testing, and over-testing for individuals not meeting medical criteria. These events can result in late-stage diagnosis of cancer in relatives, unnecessary surgeries, unnecessary spending of healthcare dollars, as well as and importantly, psychological and emotional distress to the patient and their family.

Genetic counselors are an essential part of the healthcare system. We are a required member for cancer committee meetings as part of accreditation for cancer centers. We work alongside physicians, nurses, and other medical providers to provide guidance of care for patients with genetic syndromes. Licensure is to clearly identify those in the health profession with proficient skills of a genetic counselor, resulting in only the best possible healthcare for our Connecticut residents.

I express sincere gratitude for the opportunity to support this bill. The language of SB No. 857, and the proposed amendments, speaks to the matters of the genetic counselors in Connecticut as well as the Department of Public Health.

Kind Regards,

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